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THE ABSOLUTE IDEA OF SCIENCE.

[Being Lecture I. of F. W. J. von Schelling's Lectures upon the Method of a University Course of Study, (*Vorlesungen ueber die Methode des Akademischen Studiums*, published in 1803) translated from the German (2d edition, 1813) by Mrs. E. S. MORGAN. These lectures, a translation of which is to appear in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, will afford one the best view of Schelling's System as a whole, inasmuch as they sum up the earlier or Pantheistic stage of his system, and project into view, prophetically as it were, the fundamental thoughts of his very latest system. The interest of the theme itself, and the wonderful insight displayed in its treatment, great as they are, are insignificant considerations by the side of the influence of these lectures in opening to the world a higher stage of speculative thought.—EDITOR].

FIRST LECTURE.

The Absolute Idea of Science.

It might not be superfluous to state the particular reasons which decide me to deliver these lectures, but it would doubtless be more than superfluous to take time for general proof that lectures on the method of academical study are not only useful but are necessary to the student, and are of value in the reanimation and better direction of science itself.

When with the beginning of his university course the youth first enters the world of science, the more taste and inclination he has for science as a whole, the less capable is he of receiving any other impression than of a chaos in which he can distinguish nothing, or a wide ocean upon which he is placed without guide or compass. We cannot here take into account the exceptional few who have a timely guide to the road which leads to their goal. The usual result with students of the better class of minds is that they devote themselves without law or order to all possible studies, rove in all directions without penetrating in any one to the centre which is the starting point to a many-sided and progressing culture, nor do they at the end of their course, even in the most fortunate cases, have any result for their fruitless efforts beyond the conviction of how much they have done for nothing, and what essentials they have neglected. On the other hand, minds of less capacity immediately resign themselves, submit forthwith to the beaten path, and at most try to appropriate by mechanical industry and the mere apprehension of memory,

only so much of their special vocation as they think necessary for their future maintenance.

The dilemma in which the superior student finds himself in regard to the choice not only of the subjects but the methods of study, causes him not seldom to confide in those who communicate to him their own base conceptions of, or their grudge against science.

Hence it is necessary at universities that general public instruction be given on the end and methods of academical study, both as a whole and in regard to its particular subjects.

There is still another consideration. In science and in art the particular has a value only so far as it contains the universal and absolute. But it happens too often, as shown in the majority of cases, that the general business of universal culture is forgotten in the particular vocation,—in the effort to become an excellent lawyer or physician is forgotten the far higher end of becoming a cultivated man with a mind ennobled by science. It ought to be remembered that the study of the general sciences is an efficient remedy for this one-sided culture. In a general way I do not wish to deny this, on the contrary I affirm it. Geometry and mathematics lead the mind to pure, rational, scientific knowledge which has no need of material application. Philosophy, which comprehends the whole man, is still better able to free the mind from the limitations of a one-sided culture, and to lift it up into the realm of the universal and the absolute. But between the more general science and the special branch of knowledge to which the individual devotes himself, there either exists no relation at all, or at least science in its universality cannot allow itself to go so far as to point out these relations, and so he who is not in a condition to recognize them for himself in view of the particular sciences, has lost the guiding thread of the absolute, and prefers voluntarily to isolate himself from the living whole, rather than waste his powers in a vain endeavor after unity with it.

Hence the knowledge of the organic totality of science must precede the special education for a particular profession. He who devotes himself to a particular science must learn its position in the whole, the spirit which animates it as well as the method of completing it so that it may fit into the harmonious plan of the whole; he must also learn how to seize this science

so as to conceive it not as a slave but as a freeman and in the spirit of the whole.

You perceive from the foregoing that a theory of the method in academical study can proceed only from a real and true knowledge of the living relation existing between all sciences, and that without this any advice as to direction must be dead, spiritless, one-sided, and limited. Perhaps this demand was never more pressing than at the present time, when everything in science and art seems to tend towards unity, when the apparently most remote is near, when every agitation at or near the centre is communicated quickly and immediately to the parts, and a new organ of intuition seems forming which is universal and applicable to almost all subjects.

Such a time cannot go by without the birth of a new world, which inevitably buries in oblivion those who are not active workers in it. Above all it is only to the fresh and healthful powers of a young world that the care and preservation of a noble enterprise is given. No one is excluded from co-operation, since a phase of the general process of regeneration is contained in any vocation which he may select. In order to gain success he must himself be filled with the spirit of the whole, must comprehend his particular science as an organic member of the whole and recognize beforehand its function in this self-forming world. He must reach this point through himself or others before he has become rigid in obsolete forms, before the higher spark in him is extinguished by long spiritual deadness, that is to say in early youth, and according to our scheme, in the beginning of his academical course.

From whom shall he gain this knowledge and in whom shall he trust? First himself and his good genius, then those who give most unmistakable evidence that they are bound to attain through their own particular science the highest and most universal insights into the totality of sciences. Undoubtedly he who himself has not the universal idea of science is least able to impart it to others. He who devotes his otherwise praiseworthy industry to a secondary and limited science, is not able to rise to the intuition of an organic whole of science. This intuition is only to be expected at all, and then in its universality only, from the science of sciences, from Philosophy, and hence only from the Philosopher whose special science is at the same time the

absolute universal science, and whose endeavor perforce is directed to the totality of scientific knowledge.

It is these considerations, gentlemen, which have decided me to give these lectures, the object of which you will readily see from the foregoing. The question whether I am able to satisfy my own idea of such lectures and do justice to my opinions is a question which I leave unanswered, trusting in the confidence you have always shown in me and which I shall none the less strive to deserve on this occasion.

Allow me then to cut short everything in the nature of preface and introduction, and proceed at once to what our whole future research depends upon, and without which we cannot take a single step toward the solution of our task. It is the idea of knowing in and for itself unconditioned, which is absolutely only one and in which all knowing is only one—it is the idea of that primal knowing* which, separating into branches in different stages of the phenomenal ideal world, expands into the great, immeasurable tree of knowledge. As the knowing of all knowing it must be that which fulfills and contains the claim or the presupposition which is made in every species of the same, completely, not merely in one particular case, but with absolute universality. However we may express this presupposition—as the agreement with the object or as the pure dissolution of the particular in the universal, it is inconceivable, in general or particular, without the higher presupposition that the true ideal, alone and without further mediation, is the true real and nothing else.

We cannot really prove this essential unity even in Philosophy: it is indeed the initiation to all scientific spirit; but at least it can be proved that without it there is no science, and it can be demonstrated that in everything which even pretends to be science, it is just this identity, this complete solution of the real in the ideal, which is sought.

Unconsciously this presupposition lies at the bottom of all that science boasts as to the general laws of things, of all Nature itself, and is the foundation of all effort to learn these laws. They

* *Urwissens* which is generally rendered in this article by the phrase "archetypal knowing." It describes what is called later by Hegel, the "pure knowing," or the knowing of ideas which are at once the logical condition of thinking and also of being.

wish that the concrete and the impenetrable (in particular phenomena) shall be resolved into the pure self-evidence and transparency of a universal rational knowledge. This presupposition is allowed in the more limited spheres of knowledge and in particular cases, although not understood, and consequently not conceded as absolute and universal according to the dicta of Philosophy.

With more or less consciousness the geometer bases his science on the absolute reality of the purely ideal, when he proves that in any possible triangle the sum of the three angles equals two right angles. He proves his knowledge not by comparison with concrete or actual angles or by means of them, but by the laws of intuition itself. He knows it immediately from the nature of knowledge itself, which is pure ideal and consequently pure real. But if we wished to limit the question of the possibility of knowledge to the question of mere finite knowledge, still the quality of empirical truth which the latter has would be incomprehensible through any relation to the something which we call subject,—in what other way could we arrive at it than by means of knowledge itself—hence it would be altogether incomprehensible unless that ideal which appears finitely in empirical knowledge and furnishes the conditioning laws of finite things, were not the reality and the substance of things.

But this first presupposition of all science, this essential unity of the unconditioned ideal and the unconditioned real, is only possible if that which is the one is also the other. But this is the idea of the absolute, namely, that the idea in its primary aspect is also being. So the absolute is both this first presupposition of knowing and the first knowing itself.

Through this first knowing is all other knowing in the absolute, and itself absolute. For although the archetypal knowing in its complete absoluteness dwells originally only in the absolute ideal, still we imagine it as essence of all things, and the eternal ideal of ourselves. Our knowing in its totality is a copy of that eternal knowing. Of course I do not speak of the particular sciences, which of them and how far they have separated from this totality and deviated from their true original. Of course only knowing in its totality can be a complete reflex of that original knowing, but each single knowing and each particular science is included as an organic part of this whole, and hence all knowing which is not mediately or immediately, no matter through

how many intermediate members, related to the archetypal knowing, is without reality or meaning.

Whether we can work in the particular science with intelligence and that higher inspiration which we call scientific genius, depends upon our ability to see the particular knowing in its relation with the original, the whole. Every thought not conceived in the spirit of this unity and totality, is in itself empty, and may be rejected. Every part which is not capable of harmonious action in this active and living whole, is a dead weight, which according to organic laws will sooner or later be cast out, and indeed there are plenty of sexless bees in the hive of science who being forbidden to create, multiply their own stupidity in copies by means of inorganic division. While asserting the idea of the nature of knowing, I have nothing to add as to the dignity of science in and for itself. No rule for the cultivation or the acceptance of science in and for itself which I can establish in the following lectures will originate in any other source, or in any other than this one idea.

The writers of the history of Philosophy tell of Pythagoras that he changed the name of Philosophy, which until his time had been *σοφία*, into *φιλοσοφία*, the love of wisdom, for the reason that God alone is wise. However it may be with the historical truth of this story, in the change and the alleged reason for it, there is a recognition that all knowing is a striving for communion with the Divine Being, for a participation in that archetypal knowing whose image is the visible universe, and whose birthplace is the Source of eternal power. According to the same view, since all knowing is one and every kind enters only as a member into the organism of the whole, all science and species of knowing are parts of one Philosophy, namely, the effort to participate in archetypal knowing. Everything then which springs immediately from the Absolute as its root is itself absolute, hence has no purpose but of itself, is self-end. But knowing in its unity is the one co-absolute phenomenon of the universe, of which the other is being or nature. In the realm of the Real, finitude rules, in the realm of the Ideal, infinitude; the former is what it is through necessity, the latter through freedom. Man, the rational being *par excellence*, is set up as a complement to the phenomenal world, through him by means of his activity is to be developed what is wanting in God's revelation.

Nature indeed contains the whole divine being but only in natural forms, the rational being is to express the image of the same divine Nature, divine as it is itself, in the ideal.

We must expect a very common objection to the absoluteness of science—giving it a higher expression than it generally receives. The objection is that knowing is only a part of that representation of the Absolute projected into finitude, and is only a means in it of which action is the end.

Action, action! is the cry which indeed sounds from many sides, but is set up most loudly by those who can do nothing with knowing.

There is much in favor of this challenge to action. Any one can act, we say, for this depends only on the free will. But knowing, especially philosophical knowing, is not in every one's power, and without other conditions nothing can be accomplished, even if we have the best will.

We propose this question over and above this objection: What kind of action can that be in relation to which knowing stands as means, and what kind of knowing which is related to action as its end?

What reason can be given for even the possibility of such an antithesis?

If the principles which I am here compelled to cite can receive full light from all sides only in Philosophy, it does not prevent their being at least intelligible in their present application. He only who has comprehended the idea of the Absolute, will also see that only one basis of possible antithesis is conceivable in it, and hence even if antitheses can be evolved, they must all proceed from that one. The nature of the absolute is as the absolute ideal to be also the absolute real. In this characteristic lie the two possibilities, that as ideal it posits its essence in the real as its form, and as this form can be only an absolute one, it eternally resolves itself into the essence, so that it is essence and form in perfect coalescence. In these two possibilities consists the only act of archetypal knowing, but since it is simply indivisible, hence is both reality and ideality, there must be an expression of this inseparable duality in every act of the absolute knowing; and in that which as a whole appears as the real, as well as in that which manifests itself as the ideal, both must be formed into one. As in Nature, the image of the divine transformation of ideality into reality and also the transformation of

the latter into the former, appears through light and perfected by reason, so on the other hand in that which as a whole is seized as the ideal, there must be a real and an ideal side, of which one is ideality in reality (but still ideal), the other the opposite mode of the unity. The first mode of manifestation is knowing so far as subjectivity appears in objectivity; the other is action in so far as it is considered as the taking up of the particular into the universal.

It is sufficient to comprehend these relations if only in the highest abstraction to see that the contrast in which the two unities (within the equal identity of archetypal knowing) manifest themselves as knowing, and action takes place only for the mere finite comprehension: for if in knowing the infinite images itself to the finite in an ideal way, in action, and in the same way the finite images itself to the infinite, it is self-evident that each of them in the idea or in its nature expresses the self-identical, absolute unity of archetypal knowing.

Finite knowing and finite doing posit in a conditional way and in succession that which in the idea is unconditioned and coetaneous; for this reason they appear in the former (that is, finite knowing and action) as necessarily separated, while in the latter, on account of their equal absoluteness, they are one; as in God, the idea of all ideas, the absolute wisdom, because it is absolute, is also unconditioned power, without the precedence of the idea as intention through which the deed would be determined, and consequently is at the same time absolute necessity.

It is true of this as of all other antitheses, that they are so only so long as each member is not for itself absolute—that is, so long as they are conceived only by the finite understanding. The ground of the artificial antitheses lies then in an equally incomplete idea of both knowing and doing, which is elevated by making knowing a means of action as its end. The knowing can have no such relation to really absolute action: for being absolute it cannot be determined by knowing. The same unity which is in knowing forms itself in action into a world which is absolute and based upon itself. The question is neither of phenomenal deed nor of phenomenal knowing: one stands and falls with the other, for each has a reality only in contrast with the other.

Those who make knowing the means, and action the end, have no notion of either except what they have taken from daily life, where knowing must be such as to become the means to action.

Philosophy is to teach them to do their duty in life, it is for this that they need philosophy : they do not do their duty from a free necessity, but as subjects of a notion which science suggests. On every hand science is to serve them in planting their fields, in perfecting trade, or in rebuilding their dissipated powers. They call geometry a beautiful science, not indeed because it is the purest species of proof, the most objective expression of reason itself, but because it teaches how to survey fields and build houses, or makes possible the voyages of merchant ships ; for since it is also of use in war, its value is diminished, because of course war is opposed to universal philanthropy. Philosophy is of no value for the first of these uses, and in the latter it can at most make war against shallow brains and the apostles of utility in science—hence it must be on the whole highly objectionable.

Those who do not comprehend the unity of knowing and action, bring forward such popular objections as this : that if knowing and action were one, then the latter would always follow from the former—whereas one can know the right very well without doing it. They are quite correct in saying that action does not result from knowing, and they thus declare that knowing is not a means to action. They are only wrong in expecting such a result. They do not understand the relations between absolutes, how each particular can be unconditioned in itself, and in placing one in the relation of means and the other in the relation of end to *each other*, make both dependent.

Knowing and action can never be in true harmony except through their equal absoluteness. As there can be no true knowing which is not mediately or immediately the expression of primordial knowing, so there can be no true action, no matter through how many interposing links, which does not express the primitive action, and in it the divine essence. That freedom which is looked for and believed to exist in empirical action, is as little freedom and as much an illusion as the truth in empirical knowing. There is no true freedom except in absolute necessity, and there is the same relation between freedom and necessity that there is between absolute knowing and absolute action.
